

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

Without prejudice, this listing of the claims replaces all prior versions and listings of the claims in the present application.

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

1-11. (Canceled).

12. (Currently Amended) A method for preventive protection of vehicle occupants in dangerous situations, the method comprising:

determining a distance of the vehicle to objects on a roadside on an ongoing basis according to size;

determining whether the distance is less than a critical distance;

initiating protective measures as a function of the determination;

determining a host vehicle velocity by magnitude; [[and]]

determining the critical distance as a function of the determined host vehicle velocity; and

if the determined distance again exceeds the critical distance, canceling the initiated protective measures again.

13. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 12, wherein, if it is determined that the actual distance is less than a first critical value, protective measures of a first kind are initiated, and if it is determined that the actual distance is less than a second critical value, which is less than the first critical value, protective measures of a second kind are initiated.

14. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 13, wherein the protective measures of the first kind include at least one of an audible and visible signaling to a driver of the vehicle.

15. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 13, wherein the protective measures of the second kind include at least one of (a) an activation of at least one reversible restraining device and (b) a preparation of at least one irreversible restraining device.

16. (Canceled).

17. (Currently Amended) ~~The method according to claim 12,~~ A method for preventive protection of vehicle occupants in dangerous situations, the method comprising:

determining a distance of the vehicle to objects on a roadside on an ongoing basis according to size;

determining whether the distance is less than a critical distance;

initiating protective measures as a function of the determination;

determining a host vehicle velocity by magnitude; and

determining the critical distance as a function of the determined host vehicle velocity,

wherein the critical distance is determined in such a way that below a predefined host vehicle velocity, the critical distance is zero, and above a predefined distance, the critical distance is independent of the host vehicle velocity, and between the two values, a relationship between the host vehicle velocity and the critical distance runs in a substantially linear fashion, according to a predefined function.